

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Madam:

This letter is being submitted by the 211 National Leadership Group which consists of two volunteer partnerships of 211 Executives working closely with the United Way Worldwide (UWW) and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) to develop tools and plans to improve the 211 National Network. At our most recent conference in Atlanta, GA, the 211 National Leadership Group discussed our collective position in regards to the North American Numbering Council (NANC) recommendation to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as it related to the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act.

As a network, we have been closely following the reports published related to the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act. The most recent report by the North American Numbering Council (NANC) recommended the expansion of the 211 Dialing Code to formally include mental health and suicide prevention along with the general health and human service information and referral purpose. The 211 network already handles close to one million calls per year related to suicide and mental health crises. Furthermore, about 25% of the 211 network are blended centers that provide both crisis intervention and 211 services. Many of these blended centers are current partners of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). We are also concerned about the rise in suicides in our community. This is why the 211 National Leadership Group supports the NANC recommendation and is committed to working with the 211 network and other partners to ensure expansion success.

The 211 Centers that are NSPL partners work with Contact USA, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), Living Works, and/or the American Association of Suicidology to obtain accreditation and staff certification in crisis intervention theory and techniques to ensure high-quality services are provided. While NSPL calls related to an active suicide do reach trained 211 Specialists, our call record data indicates that a large majority of the calls answered through NSPL are not active suicides. Instead, these callers need reassurance, emotional support, and community resources, but not law enforcement intervention or rescue. Trained 211 Specialists utilize their skills set to de-escalate these callers and, where needed, work

collaboratively with them to complete a safety plan to ensure community, family, and professional support in order to prevent any suicide attempts.

We strongly believe that the best way to save lives and connect people in need of services is to collaborate and develop a plan to leverage the existing assets of various partners to create one cohesive ecosystem of crisis intervention and support. Our recommendation is a collaborative solution that connects 211s and NSPL centers and leverages available technology to direct calls to the best people to handle them as quickly as possible. It is important to note that any expansion of the 211 Dialing Code will require a significant increase in the funding to the operation of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline via 211. With adequate funding and the support of the FCC, a combination of technology enhancements, continued collaboration around staff training, and a strong public awareness strategy, together we can make 211 the place to call for *any help*. Rather than requiring a person in crisis to determine which of several options they should contact, we can together ensure that they reach help quickly through a single 3-digit number.

We appreciate your kind consideration of our comments on this life-saving issue.

Sincerely,



Anna M. Babin

President and CEO, United Way of Greater Houston

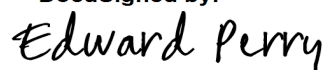
Chair, National 211 CEO Partnership

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Donna Snyder-White

Vice President of Community Impact, United Way of Delaware

Co-Chair, National 211 Steering Committee

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Edward Perry

Vice President of Program and Services, 211 Tampa Bay Cares

Co-Chair, National 211 Steering Committee